

LADY CATHERINE

86 PRIDE AND PREJUDICE ACT III

ham and other officers. (*At mention of Wickham, ELIZABETH gives a start; grasps back of chair L.*)
 Mrs. BENNET. (*Proudly. To BENNET*) Yes, the dear child is always surrounded. You have never done Lydia justice. You will see, she will make the best match of all my girls. (*As ELIZABETH sits L.*) That's sensible, my love. You've told me so little of your visit. How do the Collinses live? Very comfortably, I suppose. What sort of a table do they keep? I suppose Charlotte is an excellent manager? If she's as stingy as her mother, there won't be much wasted. Nothing extravagant in their housekeeping. I'll warrant.

ELIZABETH. I left before I had time to "investigate," Mama. You forget we only stayed at Rosings.
 Mrs. BENNET. (*Disappointedly*) Oh, yes, I forgot. Too bad! You can't tell me anything. I suppose when you were alone with them—in your rooms—they talked of how they should have Longbourn when your father is dead?

BENNET. I admire the composure with which you seem to face that inevitable prospect, Mrs. Bennet. Nevertheless, I wish you would not speak of me so constantly as a corpse. (*Rises; crosses to back of bench R.*) Let us hope for better things. Let us flatter ourselves that I may be the survivor.

Mrs. BENNET. Well—if people can bring themselves to enjoy an estate that is not their own—(*BENNET crosses to door R.C. Mrs. BENNET looks after him as he exits*)—so much the better—(*BENNET goes out of the door R.C. to L.*) Your father no doubt feels guilty whenever I refer to this matter.

ELIZABETH. (*Ironically*) Then would it not be kinder to spare his feelings, Mama?

Mrs. BENNET. Yes, but men should be made to feel when they have done wrong. I don't hold with this trying to escape from responsibilities—(*HILL*

ACT III PRIDE AND PREJUDICE 87

enters R.C. from R.; stands R. of door.) —when one has daughters.

HILL. The Lady Catherine de Bourgh!

ELIZABETH. Lady Catherine? (*Rises. Mrs. BENNET rises as LADY CATHERINE sweeps in, directly toward ELIZABETH; ignores Mrs. BENNET's greeting. ELIZABETH, curtseying*) Good afternoon, Your Ladyship. This is a pleasant surprise—(*Coldly polite.*)

Mrs. BENNET. (*Fluttering toward her*) I am happy to receive Your Ladyship. (*Her tone syncopatic and affected. Curtseying.*)

LADY CATHERINE. (*Without turning to Mrs. BENNET, simply looking at her over her shoulder*) This lady, I suppose, is your mother?

ELIZABETH. May I present my mother, Mrs. Bennet. Lady Catherine de Bourgh, Mama. (*BOTH ladies curtsey again—Mrs. BENNET rather elaborately, LADY CATHERINE barely curtseys.*)

LADY CATHERINE. I noticed you have a very small park here. (*Crosses to French windows.*)

Mrs. BENNET. (*Following her. Apologetically*) It's much larger than Sir William Lucas's. Has Your Ladyship lunched?

LADY CATHERINE. Certainly. At "The Jolly Millers" in Meryton. Do you suppose I should be uncertain about where I could procure my luncheon? I have more respect for my stomach, I hope, Mrs. Bennet. "The Jolly Millers" is as good an inn as any, and their cook is no doubt more efficient than the one you are likely to have in a place with such a very small park.

ELIZABETH. But of course, Lady Catherine—

LADY CATHERINE. I should like to converse with you alone, Miss Bennet.

Mrs. BENNET. (*Fluttering. Backs away from LADY CATHERINE toward library door*) Certainly. I am most flattered at your kind interest in Lizzie—

begin

If you need me, I shall be in the library—I'm reading a book. (ELIZABETH crosses and opens library door. MRS. BENNET exits into library. LADY CATHERINE examines the room, pictures, etc.; crosses to table L. of small fireplace, L., tapping it with her lorgnette to see if it is genuine. Sits at fireplace L.)

ELIZABETH. That piece is quite genuine—Lady Catherine. (Crosses to LADY CATHERINE.) Is your chair comfortable?

LADY CATHERINE. Sit here— (Indicates other chair in front of fireplace) —Miss Bennet, where I can see you plainly. (ELIZABETH does so. LADY CATHERINE eyes her an instant.) You know why I am here?

ELIZABETH. No, indeed, I don't know what I have done to deserve this honor.

LADY CATHERINE. Has not your conscience told you?

ELIZABETH. My conscience?

LADY CATHERINE. Miss Bennet, I am *not* to be trifled with. I am celebrated for my frankness. Don't assume those innocent airs—I'm not a man! They will have no affect whatever upon me. A report has reached me that you hope to be married to my nephew, Mr. Darcy. (ELIZABETH shows complete surprise.) I would not insult him by asking about the truth of this. I have come post haste from Rosings to let you know my exact sentiments.

ELIZABETH. What a long way to come for such a purpose, Lady Catherine. Especially as I know nothing of such a rumor.

LADY CATHERINE. Will you swear there is no foundation for it?

ELIZABETH. No, I do not pretend to be as celebrated for frankness as Your Ladyship. So there are certain questions I may not choose to answer—this is one of them.

LADY CATHERINE. How—how dare you? I insist on knowing! Has my nephew made you an offer of marriage?

ELIZABETH. But Your Ladyship has already declared that to be impossible.

LADY CATHERINE. It certainly *should* be! But your arts may have entangled him into forgetting what he owes to his family.

ELIZABETH. (Rises, curtseys and steps away from her) Then surely I should be the last to admit it.

LADY CATHERINE. (Furiously, rising) Miss Bennet, do you know *who* I am? I have not been accused— I am the nearest relative he has and entitled to know his dearest concerns.

ELIZABETH. (Calmly) Then question him. You certainly are not entitled to know *mine*.

LADY CATHERINE. This marriage to which you have the effrontery to aspire, will *never* take place. *Never!* Now what have you to say? (Steps down to face ELIZABETH.)

ELIZABETH. (Placidly) If there were no other objection to my marriage with Mr. Darcy—your commands would certainly carry little weight.

LADY CATHERINE. (Crosses and sweeps by ELIZABETH to table c.) Very well. If you persist—but don't expect to be received by his family—or his friends— (Turns to ELIZABETH) *Your name will never be mentioned by any of us!*

ELIZABETH. I must confess to Your Ladyship that this will not give me a moment's concern.

LADY CATHERINE. (Amazed) Miss Bennet, I am ashamed of you. *Is this* your gratitude for my hospitality?

ELIZABETH. (Turns to her) Gratitude! But, Lady Catherine, I regard hospitality as a mutual grace, and by no means consider myself an object for charity.

LADY CATHERINE. (Coming down to ELIZABETH; facing about) Understand, my girl, I came here

determined— I am not used to submitting to any person's whims, nor brooking disappointments.

ELIZABETH. That is unfortunate. It is rather late in life for Your Ladyship to be receiving your first taste of it—

LADY CATHERINE. Be silent. The idea of you wanting to marry out of your own sphere!

ELIZABETH. (Smiling) Oh, I should not consider it so. Mr. Darcy is a gentleman—I am the daughter of one.

LADY CATHERINE. (Coming to ELIZABETH) And pray, what was your mother? A lady? (Laughs scornfully) The daughter of a shop-keeper, with a brother—an attorney! (ELIZABETH turns away from her) You see, I am not deceived by your airs and graces.

ELIZABETH. (Turns to her) And you, Lady Catherine, the daughter of a peer! (Stepping away from her) It's strange how little birth seems to affect questions of taste—or— (To LADY CATHERINE) —gentleness of heart.

LADY CATHERINE. As if you could possibly know anything about such things. (Crosses to ELIZABETH) Answer me once and for all— Are you engaged to my nephew?

(Mrs. LAKE opens conservatory door; looks into living room in astonishment; makes a sign that there is too much noise. ELIZABETH nods.)

ELIZABETH. I must ask you to speak in a lower key. My sister is asleep out there. (Walks away from her; crosses R. to bench) No, I am not engaged to him.

LADY CATHERINE. (Crosses to sofa) And will you promise me you never will be?

ELIZABETH. (Turning to her; quietly) I will not.

LADY CATHERINE. Miss Bennet, I am shocked!

(Pompously; sits on sofa) Then I refuse to leave until you have given me that promise.

ELIZABETH. (Crosses to door R.C. and pulls bell cord) I trust Your Ladyship will have a pleasant journey back to Rosings. (LADY CATHERINE rises in amazement. HILL enters R.C. from L.) Hill, Her Ladyship's coach, if you please.

HILL. It is waiting, Miss Lizzie.

LADY CATHERINE. (Pauses in amazement as she crosses to door R.C.) I take no leave of you. I send no farewell message to your mother! Miss Bennet, I am seriously displeased. (ELIZABETH is making a curtsey as LADY CATHERINE, without returning it, stalks out R.C. to R., followed by HILL, who leaves the door open. ELIZABETH, shaking her head, comes down; crosses to fireplace R.; leans on mantel. Mrs. BENNET comes in quickly from the library R. where she has probably tried to eavesdrop. Looking around room for LADY CATHERINE.)

Mrs. BENNET. (Crosses to sofa) Oh, why did Her Ladyship leave so soon? I had hoped to have a nice talk with her about the Collinses—

ELIZABETH. (Crosses back of bench in front of fireplace R.) She didn't wish to remain longer, Mama.

Mrs. BENNET. (On each question edges over closer to ELIZABETH) She is a very fine-looking woman, my love—and her calling here was prodigiously civil— (Hopefully) She only came, I suppose, to tell us that the Collinses were well?—on her way somewhere, I daresay? (Still hopeful of being told) Passing through Meryton—thought she might as well call on you? (A lost attempt to find out) I suppose she had nothing particular to say, Lizzie?

ELIZABETH. No, Mama—nothing at all. (Mrs. BENNET rises angrily at getting no information; crosses to chair R. of table C. Mr. BENNET's voice is heard off stage.)

BENNET. (As Mrs. BENNET is at the chair C.)